
Position Statement On Student Support Services

Adopted May 2, 2001

The Connecticut State Board of Education believes that Connecticut's public education system has the duty to provide a continuum of developmental, preventative, remedial, and supportive services that enhance opportunities for **all** students to achieve academic success and personal well-being. Many students must overcome challenges that place them at risk for educational failure, including poverty, family dysfunction, emotional trauma, linguistic and ethnic differences, and community violence. Contemporary public school education requires a collaborative approach to service delivery that includes parental involvement, use of community-based resources, learning experiences that encourage and accommodate individual student needs, and effective use of student support services. Prevention-oriented services such as early intervention for academic and motivational problems, teaching of communication, problem-solving, conflict resolution and other life skills, and the promotion of physical and mental well-being through coordinated school health programs are necessary components of cost-effective educational programs.

Student support services provide assistance to the entire student population, parents, and the school community. Disciplines providing support services include school counseling, school nursing, school psychology, school social work, health education and speech and language services. Student support services specialists, with their skills in working with children and families and their knowledge of the emotional, cultural, health and communication issues that affect students and schools, play an important role in improving student achievement. Support services specialists assist other educators to understand and respond effectively to the human and social factors that impact learning, and improve student availability for learning by identifying risk factors and providing timely interventions. Identifying student strengths and talents, and assisting students in the development of post-secondary plans that incorporate such strengths and talents, are also key components of effective support services.

Home and community are critical environments that influence student well-being and educational progress. Support services specialists, in partnership with teachers, administrators and other school staff, build connections between home and school, especially when parents need help in understanding their children's educational needs and their own role in encouraging learning. These professionals are often in the best position to maintain open lines of communication while they interpret school requirements and assist families in expressing their concerns. Support services specialists understand the community and its impact on the lives of students and families, and can link the home and school to community resources, expedite appropriate referrals, and facilitate communication between home, school, and community services.

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To use student support services to full advantage, school districts are advised to adopt the following practices:

1. Districts should implement prevention-oriented programs and services that promote a positive school climate in which individuals feel connected, safe and supported, and that reduce the prevalence of risky behaviors such as alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, early sexual activity, bullying and violence, truancy and school avoidance.
2. Districts should implement a comprehensive PreK-12 life skills curriculum that delineates goals and competencies in the areas of personal/social, career and academic development, and prepares students for success in school, at work, in the community and in personal relationships.
3. Districts should establish school-based and/or district-wide support services teams to assess the health and mental health needs of the school community, and coordinate the delivery of an array of services that includes prevention, early intervention, intervention and crisis response. These teams should include support services specialists, school administrators and representatives of community agencies (e.g., police, Department of Children and Families, health and mental health care providers).
4. Support services specialists should analyze existing research to identify best practices in the provision of student support services, and design evaluation studies to assess effectiveness of district programs and services.
5. Districts should provide continuing education for all school professionals on collaborative models of service delivery to prepare them to recognize students at risk for educational or social failure and to team with support services providers, families and community providers in improving student outcomes.
6. Support services specialists should be included in regular education intervention teams (e.g., Early Intervention Team, Student Assistance Team), providing professional consultation and support to both school staff and parents.
7. Districts should use the State Department of Education document, “Developing Quality Programs for Pupil Services: A Self-Evaluative Guide” (1999) to ensure that programs and services provided by support services staff are of the highest quality and greatest benefit to the school community.
8. Districts should adopt discipline-specific criteria for evaluating support services specialists, using the competencies and indicators developed by the State Department of Education (see CT State Department of Education, 1993, reprinted in CT State Department of Education, 1999).

The Board believes that implementation of these practices within a comprehensive program of school-based support services will help students to become self-sufficient, healthy, productive, and resilient adults who value themselves and others. By adopting a preventative, whole-child orientation and providing a wide range of interventions, schools will be better equipped to reduce barriers to learning and enhance healthy development.

References

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